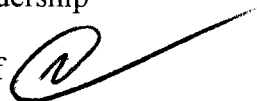




Homeland Security

July 25, 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senior DHS Leadership

FROM: Michael Chertoff 

SUBJECT: Progress and Expectations with Regard to Increasing
the Employment of People with Disabilities

The Department of Homeland Security, still in its nascent stages of development, has done a tremendous job of carrying out its responsibilities to our Nation. In spite of the breadth and challenge of our mission, our innovative and dedicated public servants have molded this Department into a robust and effective Federal agency. Oftentimes, however, the Department's notable successes are overlooked. So this month, as we recognize the 15th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I want to call your attention to one important area where we are setting the standard—the employment of people with disabilities.

Over the past year, thanks in large part to the leadership of President George W. Bush and former Secretary Tom Ridge, we have made incredible strides toward creating a Department that fully recognizes and utilizes the skills and abilities of people with disabilities. I am personally committed to DHS fulfilling this goal. To that end, I would like to review our progress and announce some steps we will take to further this initiative.

I. Background of Disability Employment Initiative

On February 17, 2004, Secretary Ridge issued a memorandum to the senior leadership announcing his expectations with regard to increasing employment opportunities for qualified candidates with disabilities. The purpose of the initiative was to provide DHS managers with the tools necessary to hire people with disabilities. The hope was that once a wide range of tools were in place and well-publicized, we would naturally begin to see a change in the number of people with disabilities joining our workforce.

Each office within DHS headquarters was required to take the following steps:

- Ensure that managers attend a training session on disability issues.
- Appoint an individual to coordinate with the Selective Placement Coordinator (the individual at headquarters responsible for identifying qualified candidates with disabilities).
- Hire at least one intern with a disability each fiscal year.
- Participate in National Disability Mentoring Day.
- Publicize our partnership with the Department of Defense's Computer/Electronic Accommodation Program (CAP), which provides assistive technologies and services to employees and applicants with disabilities (e.g., teletypewriters for the deaf/hard of hearing and Braille keyboards for the blind).

Additionally, each organizational element was asked to create a customized strategy, designed specifically for that component, to increase employment opportunities for qualified individuals with disabilities. Each component also was asked to track and report on the progress of the initiative.

II. Progress in Implementing the Disability Employment Initiative

I am pleased to share with you the highlights of our accomplishments to date:

- 273 DHS headquarters managers and over 4,000 managers in field offices across the country have completed training sessions on this initiative.
- DHS employed 38 interns with disabilities nationwide in the past year, a dramatic improvement over the prior year. At headquarters, the number of interns with disabilities rose from zero in fiscal year 2003 to 12 in fiscal year 2004.
- On October 20, 2004, DHS participated in "National Disability Mentoring Day." DHS employees in Washington, D.C. mentored 44 students from various high schools, colleges, and universities, and 80 students participated in mentoring opportunities at FLETC and ICE/CIS locations nationwide.
- DHS made tremendous strides in reaching out to disabled veterans, particularly those returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. DHS recruited from 68 organizations, associations, and agencies serving veterans. DHS also worked with the Department of Veterans Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment directorate to disseminate information on job openings across the country and to provide volunteer internship opportunities.
- DHS employees received 203 CAP accommodations in fiscal year 2004, a savings to DHS of almost \$85,000. This represents a dramatic increase in the use of CAP compared to previous years. As a result, CAP awarded DHS with the Model Employer for People with Disabilities Award in 2004.

All of this work has paid concrete dividends at DHS headquarters. Since the foundation was laid for equal opportunity, the results have been dramatic. There has been a 106% increase in hiring people with disabilities at DHS headquarters since this initiative began

in February 2004. Specifically, we went from 50 people with disabilities in February 2004 to 103 as of June 16, 2005.¹

We learned this past year that internships are worth the investment. Of the 12 interns with disabilities working at DHS headquarters in the past year, two were offered full-time employment and a third was offered part-time employment as she continued her education. One deaf college student who participated in Disability Mentoring Day advised his mentor that as a result of his exposure to DHS's work in IAIP, he was going to begin pursuing an additional degree in Arabic.

III. Next Steps

While DHS has taken significant steps toward becoming a model employer for people with disabilities, there are still several areas where we can improve. In particular, we need to redouble our efforts to offer equal employment opportunities to people classified as those with "targeted disabilities," such as those who have serious hearing or vision impairments, use wheelchairs, or have other significant mobility impairments.

To build upon our success, I am asking each office within DHS headquarters and each organizational element to take the following steps:

- Continue to stress the importance of this initiative and see that employment opportunities are afforded across the country, from senior-level to entry-level positions. We need to focus recruitment particularly on qualified persons with "targeted disabilities" at all grade levels.
- Promote use of the CAP partnership. Please explore all avenues to promote the use of this program.
- Appoint a Selective Placement Coordinator (SPC) to work with managers within your organization to provide you with qualified candidates with disabilities. The SPC can assist you in maximizing your use of the Schedule A hiring authority, which generally permits expedited hiring of individuals with disabilities on a trial or permanent basis without regard to competitive selection rules.
- For those in DHS Headquarters, please ensure that you have designated a point of contact to work with the headquarters' SPC, Kathy Lane, prior to advertising vacant positions within DHS headquarters. Ms. Lane needs to have information from and regular contact with those individuals in order to be successful in providing you with qualified candidates with disabilities. Please e-mail the name of your point of contact to Ms Lane. She may be reached at: kathleen.lane@dhs.gov or by phone at (202) 401-4166, (202) 401-2400 (TTY).
- Ensure that all new managers receive training on this initiative.

¹ In total, people with disabilities make up 4.67% of the headquarters workforce. This represents tremendous progress from the beginning days of the Department, and is also significant for an agency that has such a large segment of law enforcement and military missions.

- Provide additional opportunities for interns with disabilities. Offices should seek an opportunity to hire at least one intern with a disability in fiscal year 2005, and make these opportunities a permanent feature of your office. You should also plan to participate in National Disability Mentoring Day in October 2005. There are many avenues for identifying qualified interns. For example, the “Workforce Recruitment Program” is a database of college students and recent graduates with disabilities, including people with advanced degrees, who are ready to begin internships immediately.

I ask each organizational element head to work with his or her respective Equal Employment Opportunity office and Human Capital office on this initiative.

If you have further questions on this initiative, please contact Daniel W. Sutherland, the Department’s Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties ((202) 772-9816 or daniel.sutherland@dhs.gov).

I appreciate your continued support of this innovative endeavor. The Department will experience the benefits of it for many years to come.